

# books are political

by Forrest  
Cobb



# SOME HISTORY

## The Qin Dynasty

Throughout history, books have been political. As early as 213 BCE, a Chinese emperor, Qin Shi Huang, ordered a bonfire of books to mark his power in his new empire. These books were mostly philosophical and historical coming from states that were not Qin. His goal wasn't to necessarily rid books entirely, but specifically those not aligning with the new empire as a means of government control. As you might already know, book burning as a tradition to censor opposing beliefs in authoritarian regimes didn't stop there.

## The Library of Alexandria

A more well-known loss of knowledge: the Library of Alexandria. It is widely debated on how many times this library (or rather, libraries) suffered throughout its years but historians seem to agree that the Great Library of Alexandria was first burnt down in 48 BCE. About 40,000 to upwards of 700,000 volumes were said to be lost because of a battle where Julius Caesar set fire to an enemy fleet, which in turn, spread to the city.

While this particular incident was not intentional, when people think of the Library of Alexandria being burnt down, they are usually referring to the daughter library Serapeum. If materials did not fit into the Great Library of Alexandria, they were sent to the Serapeum. However, the daughter library mainly served as a temple. When Emperor Theodosius made Christianity the official religion of the Roman empire in 380 CE, he would later order all pagan temples to be destroyed in 391 CE. This led to an attack on Serapeum where it was completely destroyed by his Christian followers, with over 50,000 volumes being burned, and the Serapeum was no more.

It should be noted that the oppression of pagans was not an overnight event. Under Theodosius's rule, he had gradually banned public rituals, forced pagan feasts into workdays, and closed pagan temples. The Serapeum of Alexandria was described as "the last stronghold of the pagans who fortified themselves in the temple and its enclosure", the place of worship and volumes provided refuge to the pagans, and the violent rise of Christianity ultimately led to thousands of never-seen-again works.

BG: Incendie Alexandrie by Hermann

# book burning

"Dort, wo man Bücher verbrennt, verbrennt man am Ende auch Menschen": "Where they burn books, they will also ultimately burn people."

- Heinrich Heine, German Jewish poet

## Nazi Germany

Nazi Germany is also infamously known for their book burnings. In April 1933, the National Socialist German Students' Association declared a nationwide "Action against the Un-German Spirit". Their goal was to commence a literary purge where they supplied local chapters with articles for press, offered blacklists of un-German authors, and held public gatherings with well-known Nazis to give speeches with broadcast time. On May 10th, 1933, university students across 34 German towns gathered to burn upwards of 25,000 volumes. In Berlin, the German Minister of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, gave a speech to around 40,000 people where he stated, "The era of exaggerated Jewish intellectualism has now come to an end, and the breakthrough of the German revolution has once again made way for the German essence. The coming German man will not only be a man of the book, but also a man of character, and we want to educate you for that." In the same speech, Goebbels also mentions that burning the books was also an act of symbolism because they didn't burn every copy but rather it was a way to ramp up the people for what awaited. So here we can see that one of the reasons why Nazis were successful in carrying out a genocide was because many ordinary people, like university students, truly believed in their cause. The usage of propaganda and censorship was a key part of making these ordinary people believe that Jewish people were the root of their problems and it is what made the party so appealing. Ultimately, burning books was only one of the methods used in the wider scheme of the totalitarian regime and the murder of six million Jewish people.

BG: Book burning in Berlin. Germany, May

# why Books???

“Books are a threat to those who seek to rule through absolutism. Especially dangerous to the totalitarian mind-set are great works of fiction because fiction is democratic in structure. Written well, it cannot be reduced to a preconceived message or ideology.”

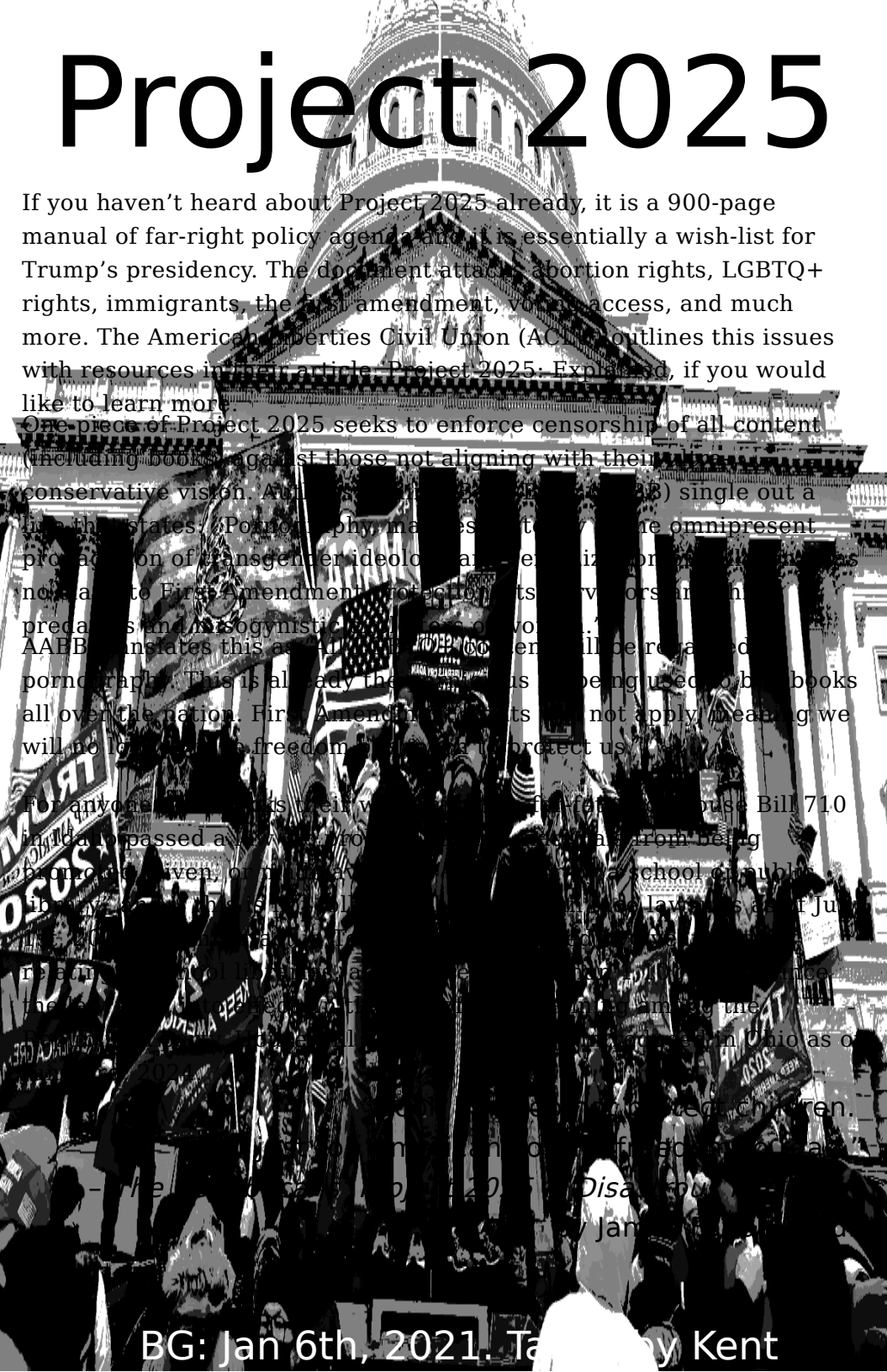
- *Book bans signal the dangerous direction society is moving* by Azar Nafisi, author of “Reading Lolita in Tehran”

In this article by Azar Nafisi, she expresses her concerns over extremist communities in the United States actively seeking to deprive reading experiences and her shock that what had happened to her in Iran could be a possibility in the country she sought refuge in. The article was written in 2022 and the following year, challenges to ban books not aligning with conservative ideologies hit an all-time high recorded by the American Library Association. After Trump’s re-election and the threats Project 2025 poses, Nafisi’s concern has become a much grimmer, terrifying reality.

totalitarian governments, I offer you a quote from Fahrenheit 451: “A book is a loaded gun in the house next door. Burn it. Take the shot from the weapon. Breach man’s mind” (Bradbury 58). This quote captivates how great of a threat books pose to those who seek control because of the power they contain; the knowledge and ideas they hold being used as a weapon to challenge the oppressors.



BG: Reading Lolita in



# Project 2025

If you haven't heard about Project 2025 already, it is a 900-page manual of far-right policy agenda and it is essentially a wish-list for Trump's presidency. The document attacks abortion rights, LGBTQ+ rights, immigrants, the First Amendment, voting access, and much more. The American Liberties Civil Union (ALCU) outlines this issues with resources in their article [Project 2025: Explained](#), if you would like to learn more.

One piece of Project 2025 seeks to enforce censorship of all content (including books) against those not aligning with their ultra-conservative vision. At 115:10 (1:53:33) single out a line that states: "Pornography, manifest in the omnipresent proliferation of transgender ideology and sexualization of children, not alone to First Amendment protections, its servitors and predators and misogynistic AABBB translates this as All LGBT porn will be regarded as pornography. This is already the case as it is being used to buy books all over the nation. First Amendment rights do not apply meaning we will not be able to defend our freedom of speech to protect us."

For anyone who doubts their words, House Bill 710 has already passed and will prohibit teachers from being biased or given, or making any reference to a school of public opinion or the status of laws as of July 1, 2025. This is a clear violation of the First Amendment. The bill also states that any teacher who is found to be biased or making any reference to a school of public opinion or the status of laws as of July 1, 2025, will be subject to disciplinary action. This is a clear violation of the First Amendment.

— [The Project 2025 Disinformation Campaign](#) —  
by Jan 6th, 2021. Tammy Kent

[illegible]

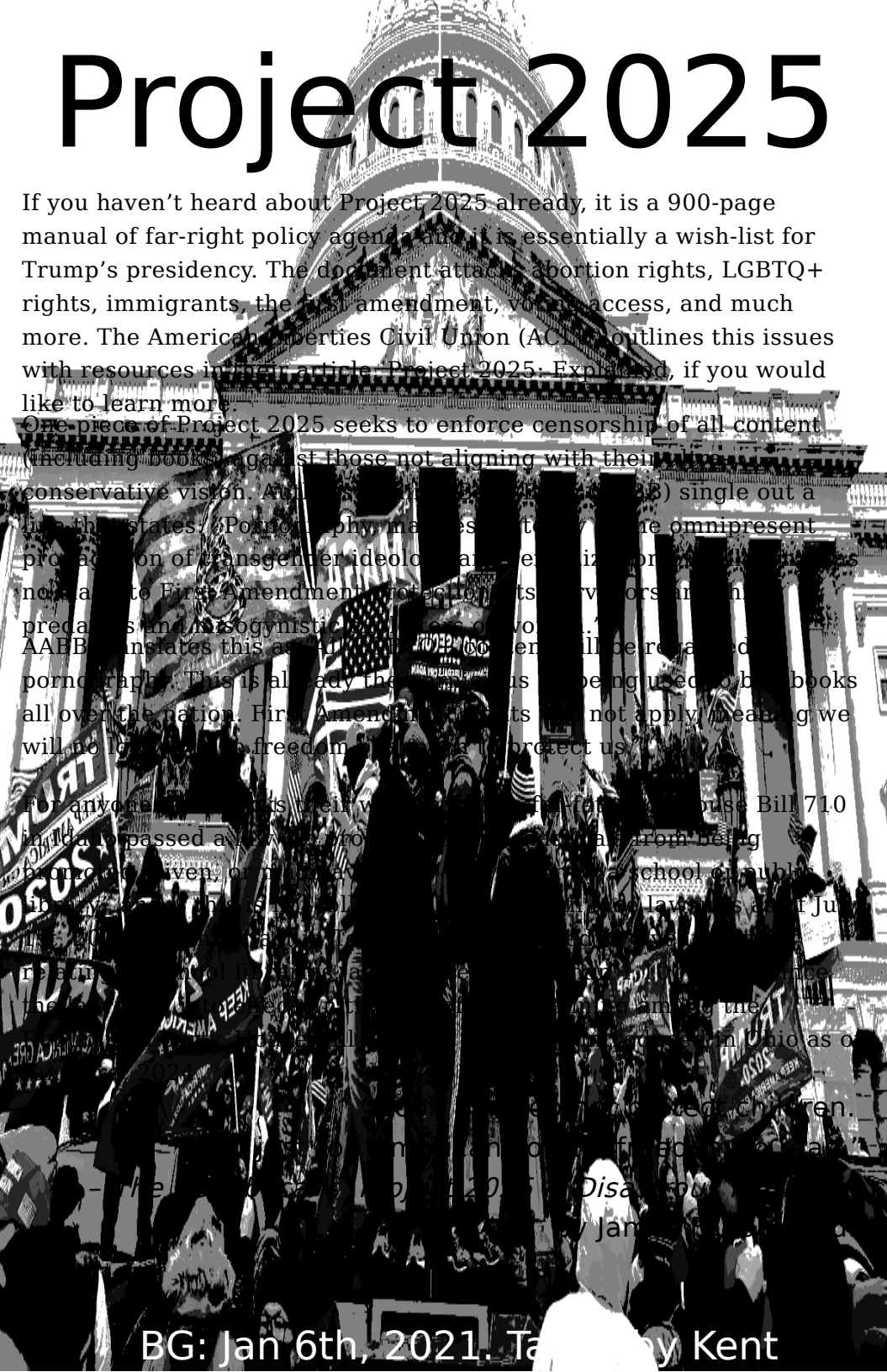
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One piece of Project 2025 seeks to enforce censorship of all content (including books) against those not aligning with their ultra-conservative vision. At pages 87-88 (Chapter 23) single out a line that states: "Pornography, manifest in the omnipresent proliferation of transgender ideology and sexualization of children, poses a First Amendment protectionists' servitors and predators and misogynistic AABBB translates this as All LGBT porn will be regarded pornography. This is already the case being used to ban books all over the nation. First Amendment rights do not apply meaning we will no longer have freedom of speech to protect us."

For anyone who doubts their words, House Bill 710 has already passed away from Congress and has been signed by Trump. It was written by a school of public law and its purpose is to strip away the First Amendment protections of all laws and regulations that were enacted after July 20, 2020. This means that any law or regulation that was enacted after July 20, 2020, which restricts free speech, will be automatically null and void. This includes the Jan 6th riot laws, the Insurrection Act, and the National Defense Authorization Act of 2020. This bill also strips away the First Amendment protections of all laws and regulations that were enacted before July 20, 2020, which restricts free speech, and which were enacted by a President who was not Donald Trump. This includes the Jan 6th riot laws, the Insurrection Act, and the National Defense Authorization Act of 2020.

BG: Jan 6th, 2021. Tammy Kent



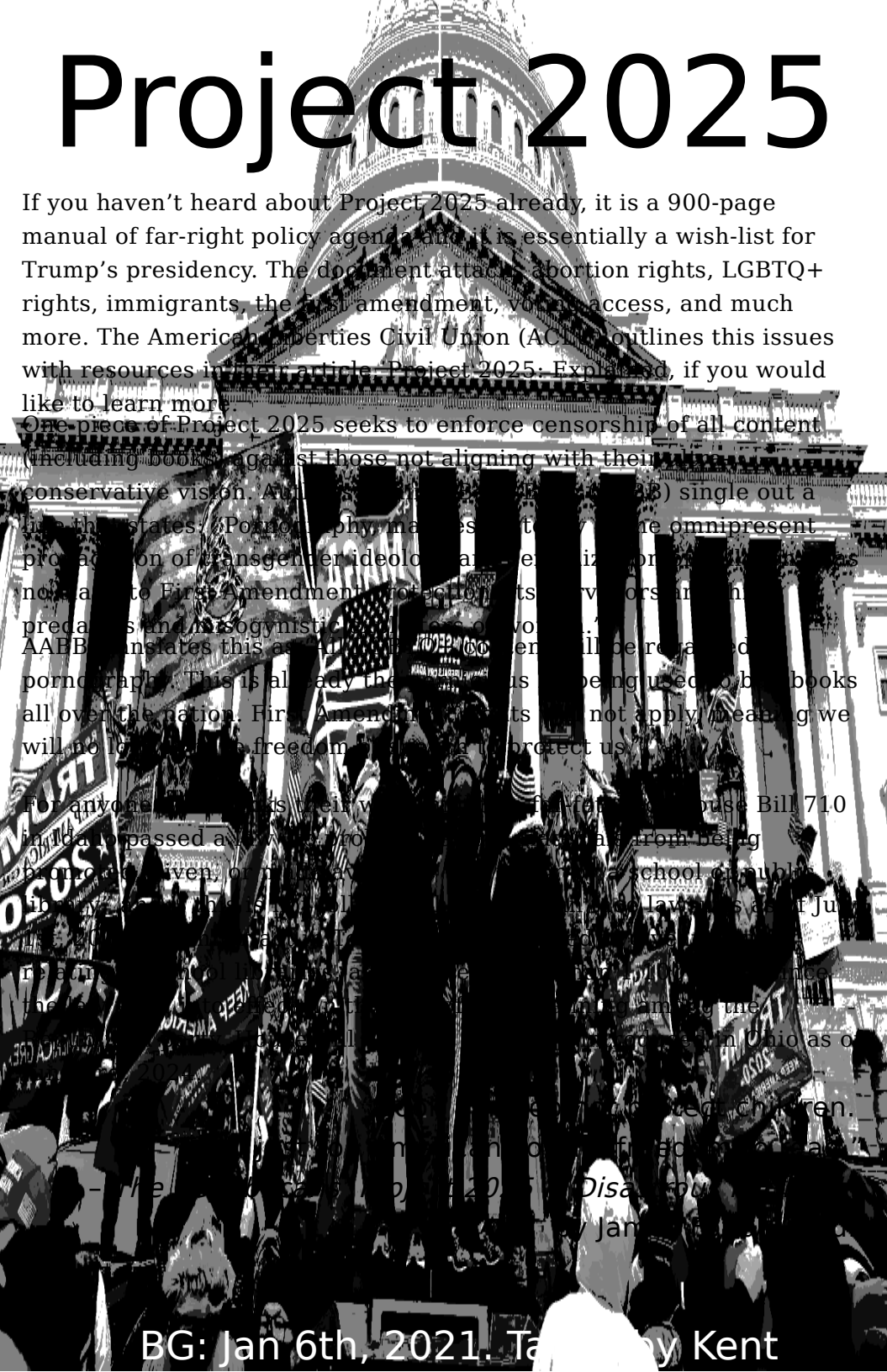
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For anyone who doubts their words, House Bill 710 has already passed and will remove federal funding from being banned or given, or much worse, to a school of public education. The school will be forced to follow laws as of July 1st, 2025. The school will be forced to follow laws as of July 1st, 2025. The school will be forced to follow laws as of July 1st, 2025.

BG: Jan 6th, 2021. Tammy Kent



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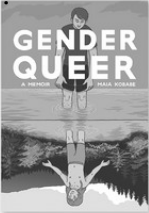
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BG: Jan 6th, 2021. Tammy Kent

# Book Ban


**Data** In 2023, the American Library Association’s Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF) reported a 65% increase in challenges of unique titles compared to 2022 and it was a record high documented by ALA. 4,240 unique book titles were targeted for censorship and there were 1,247 attempts to censor library materials and services. 47% of the titles targeted in censorship attempts included LGBTQ+ and BIPOC individuals. Here are the top four challenged books of 2023 (provided by ala.org):



**#1**  
**MOST CHALLENGED BOOK OF 2023**  
LGBTQIA+ content, claimed to be sexually explicit

ALA.ORG/BBOOKS


Number of Challenges:  
106



**#2**  
**MOST CHALLENGED BOOK OF 2023**  
LGBTQIA+ content, claimed to be sexually explicit

ALA.ORG/BBOOKS


Number of Challenges:  
82



**#3**  
**MOST CHALLENGED BOOK OF 2023**  
LGBTQIA+ content, sex education, claimed to be sexually explicit

ALA.ORG/BBOOKS

Number of Challenges:  
71



**#4**  
**MOST CHALLENGED BOOK OF 2023**  
Claimed to be sexually explicit, LGBTQIA+ content, rape, drugs, profanity

ALA.ORG/BBOOKS

Number of Challenges:  
68

# reading is inherently political

After the 2024 election, a young creator on BookTok (a sub-community on TikTok dedicated to books and reading) was inspired to make a “red list”. The red list included authors who had showed their support for Trump or were suspected to have voted for him. The list itself was flawed as it had no direct sources given as to why each author was on it. However, the creator stated that it wasn’t meant to gain as much popularity as it did and eventually it was taken down. Many people had harshly criticized the young creator and compared them to Nazis because the Nazis had also made blacklists of authors not aligning with the Nazi party. It is difficult for me to comprehend how wrong of a comparison this is. Does this mean that everyone who blacklists or boycotts something going against their political beliefs are Nazis? It certainly doesn’t. This was taken a step further when other BookTok creators shared for their discontent for politics being brought into the space. They argued that BookTok (and books in general) is a safe-haven from reality and a place to share the love of a common interest despite political differences. Many of the books popularized by BookTok have political themes. To name a few: A Court of Thorns and Roses, the Cruel Prince, Six of Crows, the Inheritance Games, Shatter Me, and so many more. To claim that BookTok is not a political space, when the books recommended within have political themes speaking from reality, is contradictory. It speaks to another issue if these people are actually digesting the books they read and not just checking it off their reading list to brag about how much they can read in a year. Reading is inherently political. Books and people’s access to them has been a political issue throughout history and it most definitely hasn’t stopped to do so. It is a fundamental human right to read but the freedom of information and access to books is a privilege. So when accessibility to literacy and the freedom to read is threatened and it is made a point of politics, reading gets itself headlines or political. It is not a point of politics, reading gets itself headlines or political. but history repeats itself; it is crucial for us to not let our guard down and ignore these threats to, not only reading, but democracy itself. Authoritarian regimes strive under censorship because when they can successfully control what we read, whether it be on social media, the news, or books, it is a warning sign of larger hardships to come.

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